

AOPC^{ON}NECTED



Issue 3, 2025

In this issue

In this issue, read about how our courts recently recognized Constitution Day, a service project led by the Superior Court, a new partnership in Allegheny County, county treatment court events and other happenings around the judiciary.

Philadelphia Supreme Court Courtroom Named After Justice Newman

On Sept. 9, the Pennsylvania Supreme Court and the Supreme Court Historical Commission named the Philadelphia Supreme Court Courtroom after retired Justice **Sandra Schultz Newman**, the first woman elected to the state's highest court.

"Today we honor Justice Newman whose distinguished public service has created a lasting legacy that will inspire generations to come," Chief Justice Debra Todd said. "By naming this courtroom in her honor, we recognize her service to the law, to the people of Pennsylvania and most importantly her extraordinary role as a trailblazer for women."

"Justice Newman opened doors for women in the legal profession at a time when those doors were often closed. Through her intellect, integrity, and unwavering commitment to justice, she carved a path that countless lawyers and judges have followed. This courtroom will now stand as a lasting tribute to her legacy and be a place where the values she embodies will guide those who serve here."

Newman's career included serving as Montgomery County's first female Assistant District Attorney, senior partner in private practice, Commonwealth Court judge, and ultimately Supreme Court justice.

"Naming a courtroom after Justice Newman is more than just an honorific gesture, it is a permanent reminder of the values that she brought to the bench," said Justice **Sallie Updyke Mundy**, the court's liaison to the Supreme Court Historical Commission. "Courtrooms are where the rule of law is tested and where the lives of citizens and institutions are most directly touched by the work and role of the courts."

"By attaching a justice's name to this space, we affirm that her service, integrity and vision are permanently woven into the fabric of our judicial system. Now, each time a proceeding is held here, and ideas are debated and exchanged, the legacy of Justice Newman will stand as a pillar to inspire fairness, equality and a steadfast commitment to the law."



Pa. Courts Celebrate Constitution Day

This month, the Supreme Court of Pennsylvania Historical Commission and the Pennsylvania Courts joined communities across the commonwealth and the nation in celebrating Constitution Day on Sept. 17.

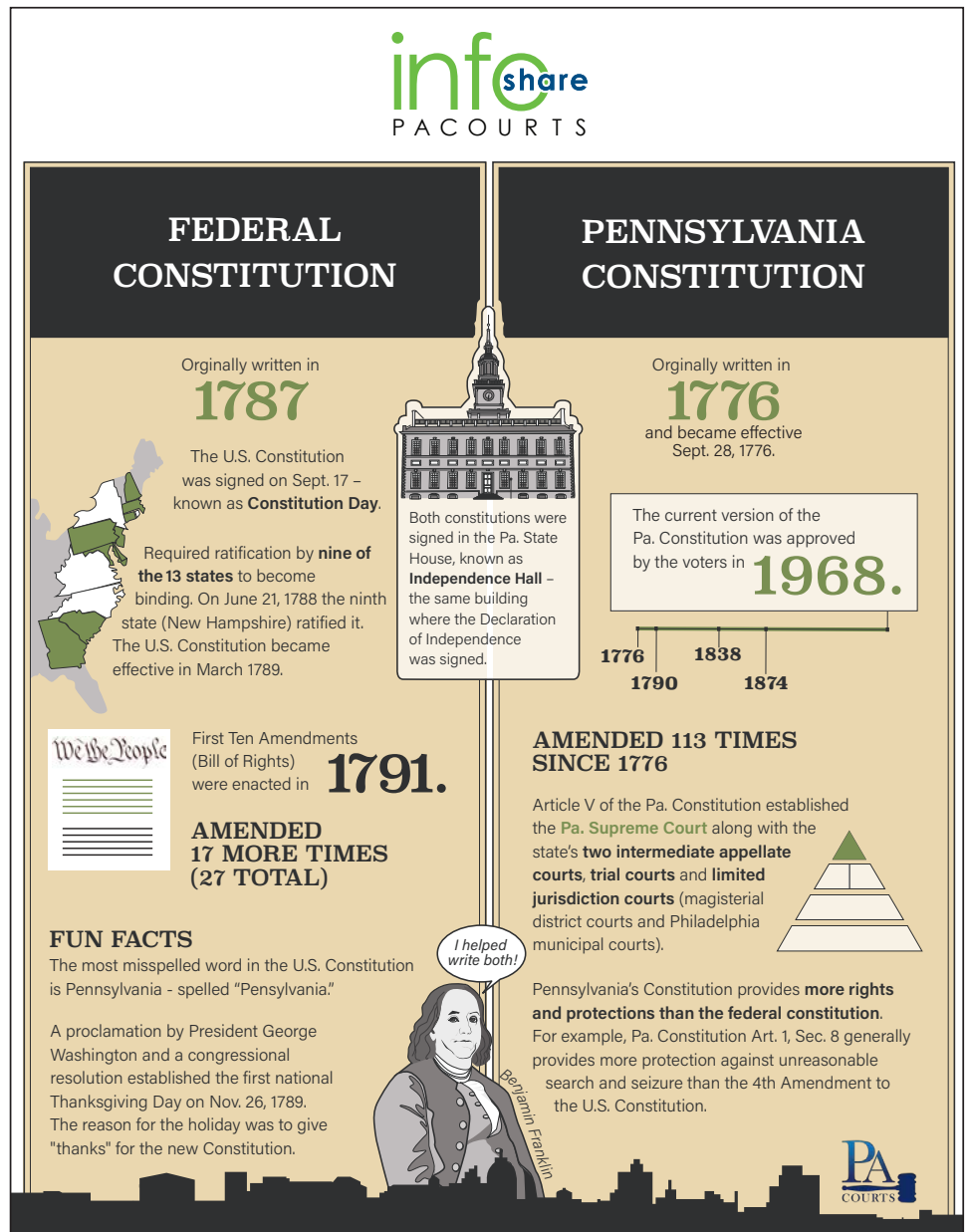
"On Constitution Day, we honor the enduring legacy not just of the U.S. Constitution, but also of our Pennsylvania Constitution which safeguards individual freedoms and reflects the values of its citizens," said Chief Justice **Debra Todd**. "Each and every day, federal and state Constitutions serve as powerful foundations for upholding the principles of democracy, equality and self-governance."

"In every courtroom across Pennsylvania, the Constitution is more than history – it is a living document that shapes how justice is delivered each day," said Pennsylvania Supreme Court Justice **Sallie Updyke Mundy**. "Constitution Day reminds us of the courts' responsibility to safeguard the principles of fairness, equality and due process upon which our democracy is built."

This year, the courts are marking the occasion with a variety of educational initiatives, outreach programs and public events aimed at highlighting the Constitution's lasting impact and the judiciary's vital role in upholding it.

Highlights include:

- **Educational Programs:** Judges visited schools to discuss constitutional rights, separation of powers and the importance of an independent judiciary. In



partnership with the Rendell Center for Civics & Civic Engagement, judges and attorneys also virtually read aloud children's books that highlight themes of law, justice and civic responsibility.

- **Student Contests:** Students of all ages are invited to enter statewide drawing, essay and multimedia contests to encourage creativity and deepen their understanding of the judicial branch and the courts' constitutional role.
- **Digital Resources:** The courts also provided online tools for educators and students including infographics, educational videos for elementary through high school students, as well as an interactive Kahoot quiz.

more information

To view the new Constitution Day resources, visit www.pacourts.us/civics-ed.





Superior Court Leads Community Service Project

Judges and court staff unite to revitalize community space in Philadelphia

On June 5, a team of 30 judges and court staff came together to make a tangible difference in the community – spearheading a hands-on revitalization project at the Belfield Recreation Center in Philadelphia.

Led by the Superior Court of Pennsylvania and the Clifford Scott Green Chapter of the National Bar Association's Judicial Council, the service initiative brought together members of the First and 38th Judicial Districts, The Barristers' Association of Philadelphia, The Brandeis Law Society and the Philadelphia Mural Arts program.

The project was inspired by a site visit earlier this year when Superior Court President Judge **Anne E. Lazarus** toured the facility with Judge **Timika Lane**.

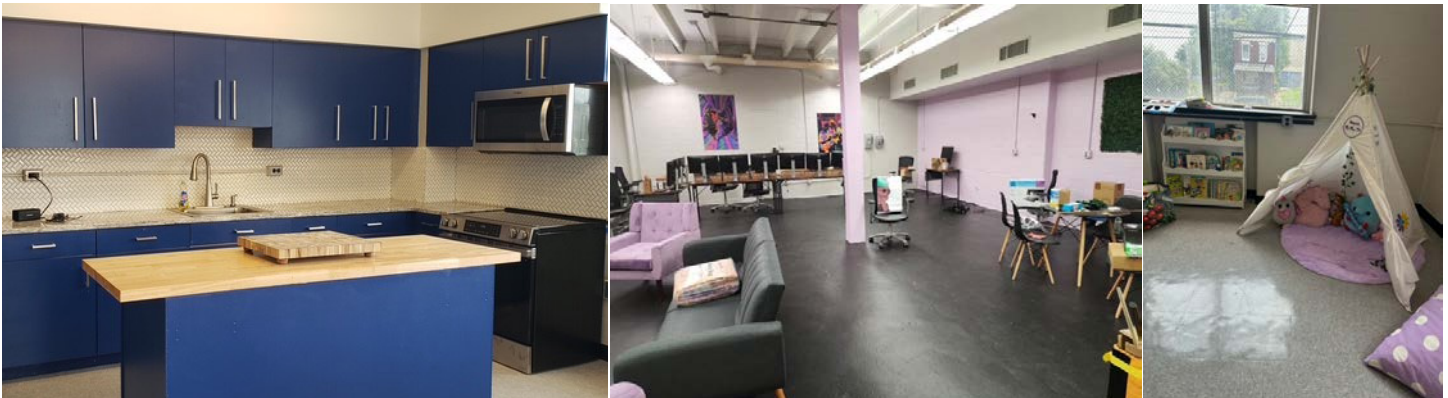
"We saw a center that served the community nearly every day of the week – hosting everything from Brownie troop meetings and adult cooking classes to basketball leagues and senior programming," said President Judge

Lazarus. "But what we also saw were heavily worn rooms in desperate need of attention."

Moved by the passionate leadership of Belfield Recreation Center Director Donnell Martin and the site's potential, the judges and volunteers organized a plan to transform key areas, including the kitchen, creating a teen lounge/ computer lab and an after-school room with a cozy reading nook. With help from the Philadelphia Department of Parks and Recreation and many hours of volunteer labor, the team transformed Belfield into a true safe haven for the community.

By day's end, the once-dated spaces were fully revitalized to reflect the vibrancy of the center.

Belfield Recreation Center Director Donnell Martin expressed heartfelt gratitude for the transformation, saying "The difference is night and day. Our community now has a space that reflects the pride we have in it."



Guardianship Reform and Elder Justice in Focus on PBA Podcast

Anne N. John, Esq., a long-serving member of the Advisory Council on Elder Justice in the Courts, recently appeared on a podcast by the Pennsylvania Bar Association to explore the critical issues surrounding guardianship reform and elder protection in Pennsylvania.

Anne shared her extensive experience with the Council, offering insights into its structure, mission and significant achievements. These include the implementation of the statewide Guardianship Tracking System (GTS), which improves oversight and transparency in guardianship cases, as well as the impact of two statewide Guardianship



Anne N. John, Esq.

Summits that brought together key stakeholders to identify reform priorities.

A focal point of the discussion was Pennsylvania's Act 61 of 2023, a landmark measure that enhances due process protections and strengthens procedural safeguards for individuals

involved in guardianship proceedings. She detailed how collaboration among judges, attorneys, state officials and elder advocates helped shape the law and continue to drive meaningful reform across the Commonwealth.

Delving into the intersection of elder law, ethics and public education, Anne also emphasized the importance of proactive planning. She noted that legal tools like powers of attorney can

often serve as effective alternatives to guardianship – empowering individuals to make their own decisions while maintaining autonomy and dignity.

For more information about Pennsylvania's evolving legal landscape on elder justice, as well as the critical resources provided by the Office of Elder Justice in the Courts and the role the judiciary plays in protecting older adults, listen to the episode.



Episode 12 - "Guardianship Reform, Protection and Dignity for Older Adults: Elder Justice in Pennsylvania" is now available on Spotify, Apple Podcasts, iHeartRadio and Amazon Music.

New Washington County President Judge

In July, Judge **Valarie Costanzo** was sworn in as the new president judge of the Washington County Court of Common Pleas, following the retirement of President Judge **Gary Gilman**, who served in the role since January 2024.

"I plan to lead our court with a strong focus on fairness, transparency and efficiency, and to work closely with my fellow judges, county

commissioners and other elected officials. Together, we can ensure our justice system works effectively and earns the trust of everyone in our community."

Judge Costanzo brings more than a decade of experience on the bench and a deep commitment to public service. Elected to the Court of Common Pleas in 2013, she has

spent a majority of her time presiding over criminal cases, while also handling juvenile and family law cases.

A lifelong Washington County resident, she earned both her undergraduate and law degrees from the University of Pittsburgh.

Her legal career began in the Washington County District Attorney's Office, and in 1998 she was appointed magisterial district judge by Governor Tom Ridge. She went on



President Judge Valarie Costanzo

to win election three times before being elected to the Court of Common Pleas.



Legislative Roundup

by Damian J. Wachter, Esq.

Budget

As of Sept. 29, the state budget remains incomplete. Versions of the General Appropriations Act (GAA) have gone back and forth between the House and the Senate, but a compromise has not been reached. Sticking points have been education and mass transit funding and whether and at what level to tax games of skill that have proliferated in clubs, convenience stores and gas stations.

Currently, one of two bills is likely to serve as the final GAA – [House Bill 1330](#) or [Senate Bill 160](#). House Bill 1330 was introduced as the governor's spending proposal, funding the entirety of the state budget at \$51.6 billion. The initial bill funded the judiciary at the amount the judiciary submitted to the governor – \$465.9 million, a seven percent increase over 2024-25. The bill was amended, lowering the overall spend by \$1 billion and decreasing the judiciary allocation to \$463.1 million, which constitutes a 6.3 percent increase. The bill passed the House [105-97](#) on July 14. It was then subject to a "gut and replace" amendment in the Senate and as currently written funds a single line item within DHS.

Senate Bill 160 reflected the 2024-25 budget – i.e., flat funding – including for the judiciary. The bill passed the Senate [27-22](#), but was quickly defeated by House Appropriations the following day.

At the end of August, the governor proposed a budget with a total spend number of \$49.9 billion. This is down \$1.7

billion from his initial proposal in February and \$700 million lower than what the House passed on July 14. The specifics of this proposal, including the judicial line items, have not been publicized.

Importantly, and thankfully separate from the ongoing debate on the GAA, the legislature passed [House Bill 640](#) which was signed into law as [Act 14 of 2025](#). Act 14 reauthorized the Act 49 surcharges until Dec. 31, 2027. Revenue from the surcharges augments several judicial line items and is a crucial component of the judicial budget.

Concurrent Jurisdiction – Military Bases

[House Bill 491](#) – amends Title 42, providing for concurrent jurisdiction with federal courts for proceedings under the Juvenile Act for violations of federal law committed by a child on a U.S. military installation. The federal court or other authorized official must waive exclusive jurisdiction, and the violation must also be a state crime. Passed the House 203-0 and referred to Senate Judiciary. Signed by the governor as [Act 6 of 2025](#).

Streamlining the Custody Factors

[House Bill 378](#) – amends Title 23, consolidating and updating the factors by which courts determine the best interest of the child in custody cases and requiring courts to provide a copy of the custody factor section of law to all

parties named in the complaint or petition. Signed by the governor as [Act 11 of 2025](#).

PFA Surcharges

[Senate Bill 302, P.N. 762](#) – amends Title 23, clarifying the distribution of the \$100 surcharge assessed against PFA defendants as follows:

- ✓ \$25 forwarded to the Commonwealth and appropriated to the PSP to maintain the statewide registry of protection orders.
- ✓ \$25 distributed to the sheriff's office, retained thereby if it performed service or forwarded to the entity that performed service.
- ✓ \$25 retained by the county for use by the court.
- ✓ \$25 forwarded to the DHS for use for victims of domestic violence.

Additionally, the legislation requires the court to adopt a means of prompt and effective service and order that the sheriff or appropriate law enforcement agency serve the petition and order. Signed by the governor as [Act 23 of 2025](#).

Treatment Courts

[Senate Bill 475](#) – amends Title 42, replacing all statutory references to “problem solving courts” with “treatment courts.” Signed by the governor as [Act 38 of 2025](#).

Tenant Clean Slate

[House Bill 1095](#) – amends Title 42, prohibiting a court or the AOPC from disseminating or posting eviction files subject to an order for limited access – eviction case information must be placed under limited access after seven years have elapsed since the filing of the eviction case. Passed the House [105-98](#) and referred to Senate Judiciary.

Tik Tok Ban

[Senate Bill 376](#) – amends Title 71, prohibiting individuals from downloading or installing an unauthorized application on a state-owned electronic device, or accessing an unauthorized application on a state wireless network. The term unauthorized application is defined as “the social networking service TikTok or any successor application or service.” Passed the Senate [49-0](#) and referred to House Communications and Technology.

Guardianship Review Hearing

[House Bill 18, P.N.1974](#) – amends Title 20, requiring the court to schedule a guardianship review hearing within 30 days

of the petition and conduct it no later than 60 days after the petition. The bill allows the court to continue the date of the review hearing for more than 60 days if it makes a written finding that the hearing is necessary because of the existence of circumstances enumerated in the legislation. Finally, the bill allows the court to decline to schedule an additional review hearing if the same interested party has previously requested one, a hearing was held, and the latest request fails to raise any new issues or facts. Passed the House [202-0](#) and referred to Senate Judiciary.

Modification of Custody Order

[House Bill 1412, P.N. 2068](#) – amends Title 23, requiring a petitioner to demonstrate a material change in circumstances for modification of a custody order. The bill provides for dismissal of the pleading or petition for failure to demonstrate a material change in circumstances and allows the court to permit modification without material change if it determines that the best interest of the child so requires or if a party includes in the petition evidence of recent abuse committed after the entry of the previous order. Passed the House [181-22](#) and referred to Senate Judiciary.

DUI ARD and Commonwealth v. Shifflett

[House Bill 1615, P.N. 1976](#) – amends Title 75, replacing ARD for persons charged with DUI with Driving Under the Influence Treatment Program (DUI TP). The bill makes entry into the DUI TP contingent, in part, on the entry of a plea of guilty or nolo contendere to the underlying offense.

While the legislation directs the automatic expungement of the criminal record upon successful completion of the program, PennDOT, the prosecuting attorney and the central repository are required to keep a record solely for the purposes of determining the grading of and sentence for subsequent offenses.

The bill repeals and replaces current law governing failure to comply and adds a section governing successful completion of program. Finally, the legislation amends several provisions of current law to maintain internal consistency. Reported from House Judiciary [25-1](#).



*{Damian Wachter, Esq.
is the director of
Legislative Affairs.}*

Constitution Day at the Allegheny Courts



On Sept. 17, the Allegheny County Court of Common Pleas Civil Division welcomed nearly 100 local high school and middle school students from seven area schools to commemorate and honor Constitution Day for an event co-sponsored by the Allegheny County Bar Association.

The event offered students a unique, hands-on opportunity to engage with the judicial process, deepen their understanding of the Constitution and see firsthand how courts operate at both trial and appellate levels.

Following a welcome by Judge **Alan Hertzberg**, Judge **Daniel D. Regan** and Judge **Jack McVay, Jr.** spoke to the students about the importance of the U.S. Constitution, the various amendments and the bill of rights. Judge Hertzberg also described the 5th Judicial District's four divisions and provided information concerning the types of civil cases.

After the opening session, students had the opportunity to observe a jury trial before Judge **Philip Ignelzi**, a non-jury trial before Judge **Mary McGinley**, oral arguments involving thorny discovery issues before Judge Regan and interesting legal disputes in general motions before Judge McVay.

The Pennsylvania Superior Court was also hearing oral arguments in Pittsburgh at the City-Council Building – an extra bonus for the students who had the chance to observe and witness just how arguments unfold before an appellate panel.

President Judge Emeritus **Jack A. Panella**, President Judge Emeritus **John T. Bender** and Judge **Maria McLaughlin**

welcomed the students and entertained questions following arguments.

Students and judges all had a great day participating and can't wait for next year!



From Treatment Court Graduate to Prosecutor

In 2024, the Wyoming County District Attorney's Office welcomed Jessica Miraglia as its new assistant district attorney – a milestone moment not just for the county, but for Miraglia herself, whose journey to the legal profession began with a second chance.

At age 18, she faced multiple charges related to drug trafficking. Instead of pursuing a traditional criminal sentence, she was offered a spot in Luzerne County's newly established Treatment Court in 2006 – becoming one of its very first participants, and an alumni of its first graduation.

"Treatment Court gave me the courage to face my past, the strength to live in the present and the hope to build a future I never thought was possible. Treatment Court gave me a second chance at life," Jessica said.

Through the treatment court program, Miraglia received the support and

structure she needed to turn her life around.

She went on to earn degrees in criminal justice from Luzerne County Community College and King's College and graduate at the top of her law school class at Widener University. After an initial delay due to her past criminal charges, she successfully appealed for admission to the Pennsylvania Bar and was granted her law license in January 2018 - with dozens of community members vouching for her character.

Miraglia returned to Luzerne County Treatment Court Program a couple years later – this time not as a participant, but as part of the team helping others through the same system that changed her life.

Now serving as a part-time Assistant District Attorney in Wyoming County, Miraglia brings that same passion and insight to her prosecutorial role, advocating for expanded diversionary



Jessica Miraglia speaking at a joint press conference with legislators, treatment court professionals and program staff, and community partners to celebrate National Treatment Court Month in May 2025

programs to provide more options beyond incarceration.

Allegheny County Family Court Partners with NCSC

The Allegheny County Family Division is launching a new initiative to improve the child custody and related motions docket, with particular focus on self-represented litigants, thanks to grant funding from the State Justice Institute.

This effort aims to improve access to justice by identifying ways to streamline and enhance how the court serves individuals who represent themselves in family law matters.

Through the grant, the Family Division will partner with the National Center for State Courts (NCSC) to conduct a comprehensive review of its Pro Se Department and related procedures.

Judge **Kim Eaton**, who previously served as administrative judge of the Family Division and brings decades of experience handling custody cases and designing support systems for pro se litigants, will lead the project on behalf of the court.

"Family court motions have always been challenging for self-represented litigants. We started pro se motions court in 1997 and have had many successes and many failures. With more and more litigants representing themselves and the public's embrace of the internet for assistance, we needed to put together a comprehensive plan," Judge Eaton said.



"The grant enables us to review our procedures while allowing us to reach out to all the entities involved in the process – including the lawyers, law school clinic professors, volunteers and others, but will also allow exploration of successes in other jurisdictions."

"After almost 20 years, we want to fix this process once and for all."

As part of the project, NCSC will engage with local stakeholders and court administration, ultimately providing evidence-based recommendations tailored specifically to the Allegheny County Family Division.

AOPC Hosts Regional Court Security Workshops Across Pennsylvania

Over the summer, the AOPC Judicial District Security Department hosted a series of regional court security workshops aimed at enhancing emergency preparedness and strengthening safety protocols for judicial officers and court personnel across the Commonwealth.

Workshops were held in Centre, Montgomery and Allegheny counties, each featuring a keynote luncheon speaker who shared valuable insight and expertise on the evolving landscape of court security.



Magisterial District Judge **Danielle Travagline**, chair of the Special Court Judges Association of Pennsylvania Security Committee, addressed attendees in Centre County. Chester County Sheriff Kevin Dykes provided his perspective during the Montgomery County session, while Beaver County President Judge **Richard Mancini** spoke at the Allegheny County workshop.

Each workshop began with a session focused on the Safety and Security of Judicial Officials and Families which offered an overview of potential threats posed by disgruntled individuals and provided practical tips for protecting judicial officials at home, online and while traveling.

In the next session, participants learned key facts about active attacker scenarios and received emergency response guidance aligned with U.S. Department of Homeland Security recommendations.

This was followed by a tabletop exercise on Judicial Threat Management, engaging attendees in scenario-based discussions to enhance awareness and promote coordinated threat response strategies.

To end the workshops, a 'Stop the Bleed' training was delivered by medical professionals from Geisinger Medical Center, Penn Medicine Trauma Center and Allegheny Health Center, offering participants hands-on instruction in managing severe bleeding emergencies.

Through these workshops, the AOPC continues to support a culture of preparedness and proactive safety across Pennsylvania's courts. Judicial District Security is already planning three court security workshops for the spring of 2026.

Student Innovators Tackle Distracted Driving with Help from PA Courts Data

A student team from the Wyoming Area School District, located in Luzerne County, is using the power of innovation – and court-provided data – to take on one of Pennsylvania’s most pressing public safety issues: distracted driving.

The team recently competed in the Governor’s STEM Competition, which challenges students to design and build a prototype that improves the lives of Pennsylvanians while adhering to universal design principles.

For their project, they developed a device designed to physically secure a cellphone inside a lockable box while a vehicle is in motion – helping drivers resist the temptation to text, scroll, or take calls behind the wheel.

“Our prototype was the CAR Box, Cellphone Automotive Restriction Box, which works by requiring the user to lock their phone inside a box to allow their engine to start, helping them stay focused on the road,” Sophia, a team member, explained.

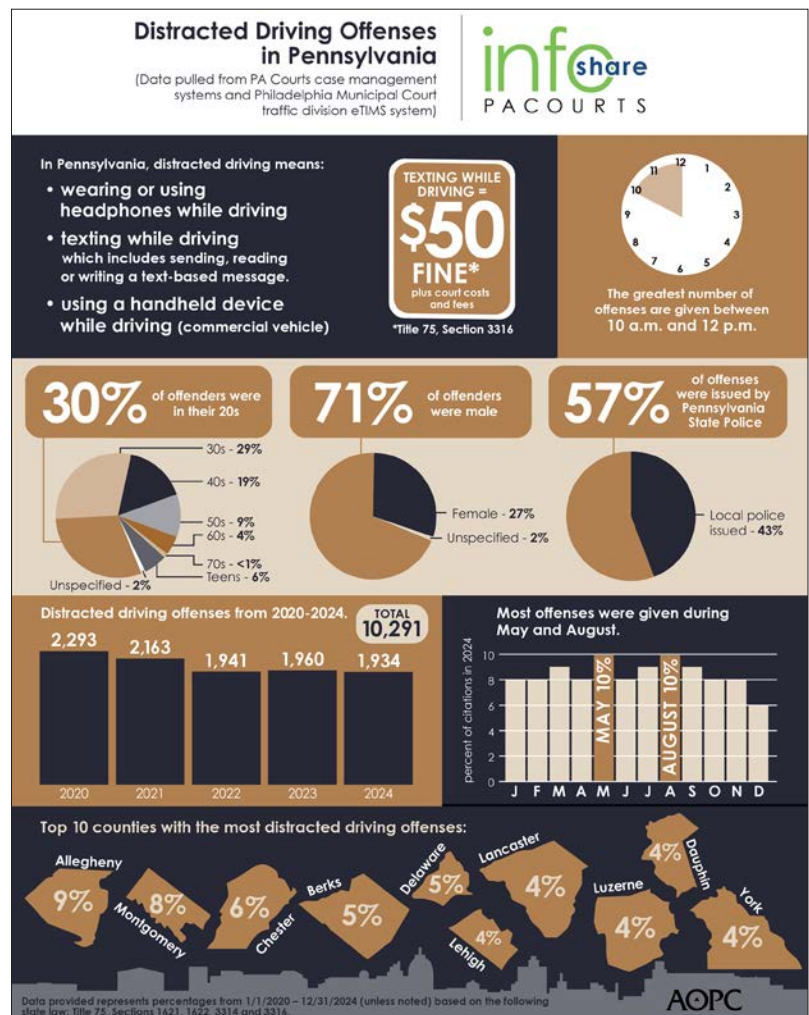
“Paul Miller’s Law (the hands-free law) cites distracted drivers after they have used their phone while driving, but we wanted to stop that before it happens with the CAR Box. The CAR Box can also be used for repeat offenders of the law or someone who wants to keep themselves and their loved ones safe.”

As part of the project, the team had to submit research that required current statistical data to illustrate the scope of the problem, and they used the latest available data from the AOPC on traffic-related citations involving cellphone use.

The team finished as one of the top 20 teams out of 80 in the state and were awarded the People’s Choice Award for the most engaging prototype.



(l to r) Grace Kohl, Mrs. McAndrew, Petra Pribula, Zhiwen Tang, Sophia Tang



Northampton County Treatment Courts Celebrate 10th Anniversary and Hold First Veterans Court Graduation

On July 22, Pa. Supreme Court Justice **Daniel D. McCaffery** joined Northampton County Judge **Jennifer Sletvold** and numerous other dignitaries and staff at the Northampton County Courthouse to celebrate the 10th anniversary of the county's Treatment Courts.

"Treatment courts are one of the most meaningful examples of how our justice system can be both compassionate and effective," Justice McCaffery said.

"Today's celebration isn't just about anniversaries or graduations – it's about lives reclaimed, families reunited and futures restored. Northampton County is leading by example and reminding us that justice can be a pathway to healing."

"These courts are about recognizing the unique struggles of those who come before us and meeting them with accountability, support and dignity," Judge Sletvold said.

"Launching the Veterans Court and seeing our first graduate walk across the stage today shows that our work continues to evolve to meet the needs of those we serve, and it is an honor to be part of this legacy and this moment."

Northampton County's Recovery Court and Mental Health Court were established in 2015 by President Judge **Craig A. Dally**, and in 2024, Judge Sletvold established the Veterans Court.

The celebration was particularly special for the Veterans Court, which held its first graduation today. The Veterans Court graduate was joined by one Mental Health Court graduate and nine Recovery Court graduates.

The graduates join the ranks of 116 successful Recovery Court graduates and 118 successful Mental Health Court graduates.

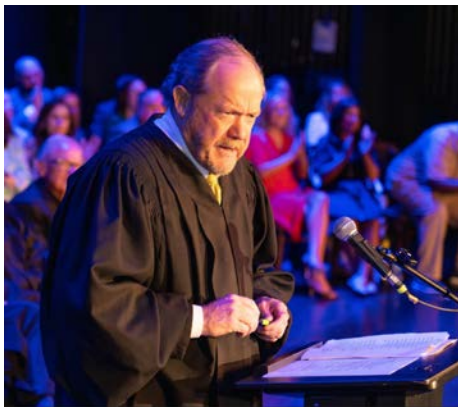


Lackawanna County Treatment Court Celebrates 25-Year Anniversary

On June 10, Lackawanna County Treatment Court celebrated 25 years of treatment court graduations with a ceremony held at the Scranton Cultural Center.

Over the past 25 years, 1,456 people successfully graduated from the program and at this celebration, they added 38 new alumni to their program.

Judge **Michael Barrasse** initiated the Lackawanna County Treatment Court in 2000, driven by the belief that addressing addiction through treatment, rather than incarceration, could lead to better outcomes for individuals and the community.



Judge Barrasse, who previously served as district attorney, recognized that a significant percentage of cases involved drugs and alcohol or mental illness, leading him to advocate for a different approach.

Reflecting on the journey and its impact over the past two and a half decades, he spoke at the graduation.

"When this program started 25 years ago, in all honesty, we had no idea what to expect. We certainly did not have expertise in a criminal justice system that was built around rehabilitation rather than punishment."

"Back then, we did not have the knowledge regarding substance use disorder or mental illness to adequately address those in our criminal justice system, and 25 years ago, our primary rehabilitation center was the Lackawanna County Prison.

"Today our community partners and our treatment providers are collaborative partners, not just silos, not talking to one another or the courts. Today every participant in the criminal justice system has access to drug and alcohol and mental health evaluation and treatment. Lackawanna County Drug and



Alcohol Commission ensures early assessments so that individuals don't languish in our prison."

"Because of the work of our community partners . . . we all rise!"

more information

Video: [25 Years of Impact: The Legacy of Lackawanna Treatment Court](#)

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Counsel by Day, Coach by Night

For many of us, evenings and weekends are for winding down. For AOPC's Deputy Chief Counsel **Kat Kotula**, they're often spent on the ballfield, coaching and cheering on her 10-year-old son, Aiden.

Kat has been coaching Aiden's baseball teams since he was five years old, carrying on a family tradition rooted in the sport. Growing up, Kat's dad coached her and her brothers, both of whom went on to play competitively. Kat herself played softball at Lehigh University, where she started all four years, won four league titles and helped her team reach the NCAA tournament.

"Baseball is a significant part of our family, and I love sharing my passion for the game with these young players," Kat said.

Kat coaches Aiden's Minor Division recreational team, the Emperors, and also helps with his travel baseball team. This season, Aiden earned a spot on the 10U All-Star team, which won their third consecutive District Championship and went on to capture the Cal Ripken 10U Northwest State Championship with a 2-0 victory over Harleysville before a packed hometown crowd in Mechanicsburg.

The win marked the first state title for this group of players, who have been competing together since they were seven years old.

In the end, Kat says the most meaningful part isn't about wins or titles.

"From a mom's perspective, I hope these memories will stay with Aiden for a lifetime," she said.

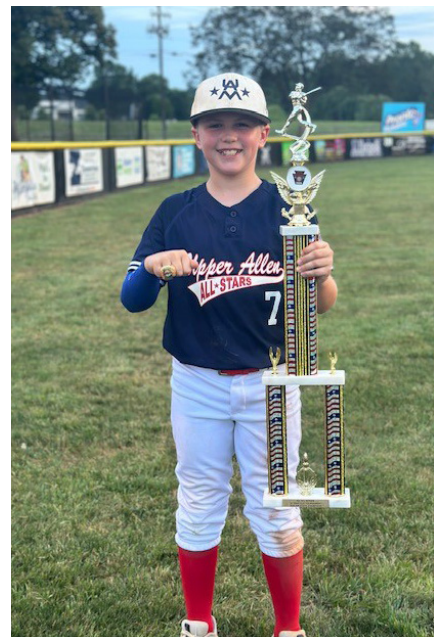
"My goal is to help them develop as players, learn the game and improve throughout the season. There's nothing more rewarding than witnessing a child get their first hit or make an incredible play."

"To me, that is almost more fulfilling than winning a championship – seeing a child gain confidence and believe in themselves."

"It's incredible to have a front-row seat and be so involved in the strategy of playing the game. Coaching allows me to spend valuable time with Aiden, which is priceless. However, when you coach your own child, it's essential to establish clear boundaries. You need to separate your personal relationship and act objectively, always doing what's best for the entire team."



AOPC's Deputy Chief Counsel Kat Kotula



County Courthouse Spotlight: **Centre County Courthouse**

Oldest Courthouse Still in Use

The Centre County Courthouse in Bellefonte holds the distinction of being the oldest courthouse in Pennsylvania that continues to conduct daily judicial operations.

Established in 1800, Centre County quickly recognized the need for a central judicial hub. Initially, court business was held in the parlor of a stone house, but by 1806, operations moved into a newly constructed courthouse on High Street. Over the centuries, the building has seen numerous expansions and restorations - each adding to its storied architecture and rich legacy.

Some milestones include the addition of two wings in 1811, the grand eight-columned front porch in 1835, and a complete reconstruction in 1855 that preserved only the columns. Later enhancements included a clocktower with a copper fish weathervane, a marble-finished interior, and rear expansions in 1909 and 1964.

Recent renovations in 2023–2024 have restored both the interior and exterior, blending modern upgrades with preserved historic elements like the original judge's bench, ornate wooden railings, and portraits of early Centre County judges.

The courthouse has played a role in the careers of several notable legal figures, including four judges who later served on the Pennsylvania Supreme Court and James Addams Beaver, who practiced law there before becoming Governor of Pennsylvania and later a Superior Court Judge.

Today, the courthouse is home to three judicial chambers, multiple courtrooms and various court-related departments. Special sessions such as naturalizations and swearing-in ceremonies are still held in its grand courtroom. A child-friendly space was added in 2023, demonstrating the courthouse's continued commitment to accessibility.

Located in the heart of the Bellefonte Historic District, the courthouse was added to the National Register of Historic Places in 1976. Over the years, it has been a backdrop to history—visited by Thomas Edison, Amelia Earhart, Frederick Douglass, and even Harry Houdini.

The Centre County Courthouse stands not only as a functional space for justice but also as a treasured landmark of Pennsylvania's legal heritage.



before

after

STOP Grant Program Hosts 2025 Regional Training Series

Addressing Interpersonal Violence in Rural Communities

By: Jamie Pizzi, STOP Grant consultant

Pennsylvania has the third largest rural population in the nation, eclipsed only by North Carolina (#2) and Texas (#1). This year's Services, Training, Officers and Prosecutors (STOP) regional training series elevated the unique challenges experienced by justice systems and victim-survivors in Pennsylvania's less populated areas.

Trainings took place in Monroe, Lycoming, Beaver and Cambria counties during the first and third weeks of August and were attended by approximately 200 multi-disciplinary justice system professionals from across the commonwealth.

Programming began with a detailed presentation by Professor Emily Strohacker, Ph.D., Penn State Harrisburg, on research she spearheaded with Center for Rural Pennsylvania - a legislative agency that serves as a resource for rural policy within the Pennsylvania General Assembly.



"I was afraid it would be on the front page of the paper," said one research participant when asked about their reticence to report to law enforcement. The lack of anonymity for victim-survivors in close knit communities was one of the most common reasons for non-reporting, alongside financial dependence, fear of retaliation by the abuser, cultural considerations, and distrust of law enforcement.

The second half of the program featured multidisciplinary panels with esteemed professionals from the court, law enforcement, victim services, prosecution and batterer intervention who echoed many of the themes demonstrated in Professor Strohacker's research from their own experience working in the commonwealth.

Panelists discussed common barriers for rural victim-survivors seeking help, such as lack of access to transportation or fear they no one will believe them.



The panelists also discussed how they work to remove barriers, including ensuring justice system personnel explain next steps in the court process, provide reminders about important dates and assist victim-survivors in understanding pertinent information.

Panelists from jurisdictions that use Lethality Assessment Protocols (LAP) discussed the myriad benefits that they've experienced since implementing the program, which is used by first responders to identify high-risk victims of intimate partner violence and immediately connect them to safety planning and support services.



Finally, panels discussed the importance of using batterer intervention programs instead of anger management to address domestic violence, as evidence-based research has shown the former to be a significantly more effective tool in changing the root behaviors that perpetuate this type of abuse. Batterer intervention programs are programs designed specifically for individuals arrested for domestic violence to address abusive behavior and foster change.

A recording of the Cambria training is available on the STOP Program's video [training database](#). Sign up for the [STOP Program's newsletter](#) to stay up-to-date with upcoming trainings and additional interpersonal violence resources for the court.



Protection From Abuse Law Refresher

Oct. 23, 12 - 1:30 pm EST | Virtual

In honor of October's Domestic Violence Awareness Month, this 90-minute webinar will provide participants with a clear and up-to-date overview of Pennsylvania's Protection from Abuse (PFA) Act and its practical application. The training will cover the basics with a focus on areas of the Act that are often misinterpreted, such as:

- Act 79 firearm relinquishment requirements and the difference between their application in Orders issued after a hearing and those issued arising from a Consent Agreement
- What "when the court is deemed available" really means in the emergency PFA context—and how to ensure petitioners have timely access to relief
- Adding pets to PFA orders and enforcing those provisions
- Additional provisions and procedural issues

Through practical examples and discussion, participants will leave better equipped to apply the law consistently, address common misunderstandings and ensure access to justice for victim-survivors while protecting the rights of all parties.

To register for the course, go to:

https://zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_gYIXuAbfR6K9Gkl5OjjadA#/registration

Can't make the live training? This webinar will be recorded, sent to all registrants and made available on our [training video database](#).

Live training eligible for 1.5 substantive Continuing Legal Education (CLE) credits and 1.5 substantive Continuing Judicial Education credits (CJE). A \$3 check made payable and mailed to the AOPC following the training is required to receive CLE credit.

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Justice

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Justice

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Justice

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Justice

P. Kevin Brobson

Justice

Daniel D. McCaffery

Justice

Judges Honored with SCJAP Awards



Themis Lifetime Achievement Award

York County Magisterial District Judge **John H. Fishel** has been named the recipient of the 2025 Themis Lifetime Achievement Award, presented by the Special Court Judges Association of Pennsylvania (SCJAP). The award recognizes judges with at least 12 years of service who have made exceptional contributions to the association and the judiciary.

Reflecting on the honor, Judge Fishel said, "It is and has been a privilege to serve such a great organization. To be nominated by my colleagues among such distinguished members is truly an honor in and of itself, so it truly was an unexpected commendation to have been selected."

Elected in 2009 and appointed by then-Governor Ed Rendell, Judge Fishel has served in numerous leadership roles throughout his career. He led the York County Magisterial District Judge Association from 2011 to 2016, served as state president of SCJAP in 2017–2018 and chaired the statewide MDJ Security Task Force, which delivered a comprehensive report on court security to the Pennsylvania Supreme Court in 2020. He has also served on multiple SCJAP committees and is currently chair of the Legislative Committee.



John T. Jeffers Memorial Award

Carbon County Magisterial District Judge **William J. Kissner** was recently honored with the John T. Jeffers Memorial Award at the SCJAP annual conference in Fayette County. The award recognizes judges who demonstrate exceptional dedication, service and leadership within the association over the previous 18 months.

"I am humbled and honored to be recognized by my peers and grateful for the opportunity to work with my fellow jurists and serve my community," Judge Kissner said.

Nominated by his peers, Judge Kissner was recognized for his commitment and service to the association. A longtime leader within SCJAP, Judge Kissner served as state president in 2022–2023 and currently serves as vice-chair of the Strategic Planning Committee in addition to roles on the Court Administration, Budget & Finance and Audit Committees. He is also one of four SCJAP liaisons to the Pennsylvania Supreme Court, a former District 10 President (2012–2020) and currently serves as secretary of the Pennsylvania Judicial Conduct Board.

Around the Judiciary



PJ John Spataro standing center. To his left is his law clerk Tom Yoset, Esq.. To his right is their Admin Asst Tracy Means.

In June, President Judge **John F. Spataro** joined staff at Crawford County Court for lunchtime wellness breaks – pulling weeds and tending the flower beds outside the Judicial Center to get it ready for summer.



At a Joint Committee Meeting on June 25, Montgomery County Judge **Steven O'Neill** spoke about the effectiveness of Veterans Treatment Courts.

"Treatment courts are the most successful intervention in the criminal justice system because you are treating the underlying issues as opposed to trying to incarcerate them away."



On July 9, Chief Justice **Debra Todd** joined President Judge **Nancy Butts** and Judge **Ryan Gardner** at the Lycoming County Courthouse to celebrate the graduations of participants from the county's Mental Health Treatment Court and Veterans Treatment Court.



Chief Justice of Pennsylvania **Debra Todd** and Court Administrator **Andrea Tuominen** at CCJ/COSCA's Annual Meeting in Rockport, Maine at the end of July.



On Aug. 5, Justice **Kevin Dougherty** joined a public roundtable at the Geisinger Behavioral Health Center in Danville to discuss mental health and community assistance – an important conversation about supporting Pennsylvanians through behavioral health services.



*(l to r) Luzerne County Judge **Jennifer Rogers**, Franklin/Fulton Counties' President Judge **Shawn Meyers**, Montgomery County Judge **Garrett Page***

On Sept. 16, the 39th Judicial District held a special ceremony at the Franklin County Courthouse to celebrate Constitution Day.



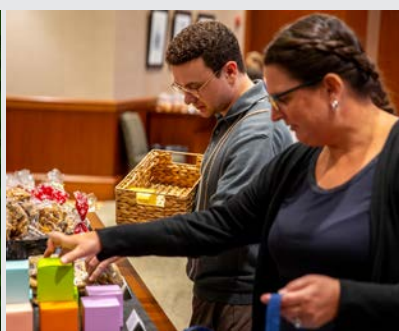
Photo credit: Temple Law

At Temple Law's 1L Orientation, Justice **Daniel D. McCaffery**, Judge **Timika Lane** and Judge **Chesley Lightsey** helped welcome the entering class of 2025 by participating in a panel discussion on navigating the legal field.



Photo credit: Villanova Law

On Aug. 19, Philadelphia Municipal Court Judge **Jacquelyn Frazier-Lyde** delivered the professional oath to students on their first day of orientation at Villanova Law, where she earned her J.D. from in 1987.



On July 23, the PJC held a 'Christmas in July' cookie exchange where employees were invited to bake and share their favorite cookies with each other.

In Memoriam



On Aug. 27, Hon. Frederica Massiah-Jackson, a trailblazing jurist whose career left an indelible mark on the judiciary, passed away. Judge Massiah-Jackson was the first Black woman to preside over civil trials in Philadelphia and later became

the first Black president judge of the Philadelphia Court of Common Pleas – the first to hold the role in any Pennsylvania county.

Early in her career, she clerked for Pennsylvania Supreme Court Justice Robert N.C. Nix Jr. – the first Black Supreme Court Justice in the state. Elected to the bench in 1983, she served nearly four decades with distinction, including six years as president judge. Known for her intellect, fairness and commitment to mentoring the next generation of lawyers and judges, she opened doors for many and leaves a legacy of perseverance, leadership and devoted service.



Justice Kevin Brobson



Judge Russel Shurtleff

On Sept. 4, Justice **Kevin Brobson** joined President Judge **Russel Shurtleff** to celebrate Wyoming/ Sullivan County Treatment Court graduation, as well as the program's 18th anniversary.